

Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 5 December 2014

(Welcome to Policy Eye, a nearly weekly additional service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days and introduced to keep a special 'eye' on developments in the build up to the 2015 election.)

The week in a word (or two)

The bones of George Osborne's Autumn Statement this week continue to be widely dissected. The Institute for Fiscal Studies in a widely trended analysis have called the scale of the cuts set for the next four years as "colossal" and suggested that it could mean 'the role and shape of the state will be changed beyond recognition.' The think tank IPPR has had a go at crunching some of the figures and concluded that for the BIS Dept at least, it could mean a future budget cut of £4.8bn. On the other hand the Chancellor has argued that we have one of the fastest growing economies "of any major advanced economy in the world" and that once a budget surplus is reached (we should be £4bn in the black by 2018) things will be better. And in fairness, others have supported his stance, notably The Times lead writer Tim Montgomerie who has listed ten reasons why cuts are necessary and ultimately of course, all Parties have plans to get the deficit down even though the pace and impact may differ.

While the economic debate rages on, the world of education is picking up what crumbs it can on careers, postgrad loans and science, research and local growth, all of which were promised additional investment by the Chancellor, and moving rapidly on. This week the DfE and Ofqual released further updates on the reform of the qualification system, including notably confirmation that the first teaching of new maths and further maths A/AS levels will be put back to Sept 2017 and the Education Secretary appeared before the Education Committee to answer questions about how it was all going. Unlike the rather sparky affair on the same subject with Michael Gove almost exactly a year ago, it was a fairly low-key session. Questions inevitably ranged on the pace and impact of reform let alone its justification as well as the more specific issues such GCSE grading, AS de-coupling and text books. The only time it really got animated was over the AS de-coupling issue: apparently the Dept is listening but so far is not for turning. Like Elizabeth 1st, who she declared this week as one of her heroines, the Education Secretary intends to see of any waverers.

Top headlines this week

- 'Disadvantaged boys learn to pick up an ebook.' (**Monday**)
- 'Private Colleges' £5m overseas students funding error.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Head teachers criticise government's 'chaotic' overhaul of A levels.) (**Wednesday**)
- 'Autumn Statement: Postgraduate loans of £10,000.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Schools' curriculum should be rated separately.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Chancellor who presented his fifth annual Autumn Statement pledging to 'stay the course to long-term prosperity' but acknowledging that more cuts were needed along the way

- The Office for Budget Responsibility whose latest report on the economy, a mix of both good and bad news, set the context for the Chancellor's speech this week
- The Institute of Fiscal Studies who offered a sober perspective on the long-term impact of more cuts to public spending
- The Education Secretary who appeared before the Education Committee to answer questions on the exam system and gave very little away
- The government who accepted Ofqual's advice and put back to Sept 2017 the introduction of the reformed A and AS levels in maths and further maths
- The government and Ofqual who published the latest batch of information on the national curriculum and GCSE and A level reform schedule
- Conservative Voice, a group of Conservative MPs, who have launched a campaign today aimed at getting a commitment in the Manifesto to reverse legislation preventing the creation of new grammar schools
- The BIS Select Committee who called for a further extension of the Catapult R/D network in their report on HE-Business links
- The National Audit Office who looked in to the arrangements for the oversight and funding of alternative HE providers and came back with some damning conclusions
- Academics who have raised concerns about the new statutory duty on universities and other education providers to help prevent people being drawn into terrorism being drafted into the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill
- The HE Policy Institute who suggested that the student vote could swing the result in at least 10 marginals in the 2015 election
- LSE, Manchester and Newcastle who emerged as the top three universities for nightlife in the latest student survey
- The National Audit Office who published a second report this week arguing that further simplification of the FE sector was needed to ensure greater clarity of function, responsiveness and value for money
- The Education Funding Agency who published updated guidance on the funding of maths and English for 16-19 yr olds in the wake of changes for students on small p/t programmes announced recently by the FE Minister
- Martin Doel, the Chief Exec of the Association of Colleges, who pledged to hand over his bus pass (when he becomes eligible in two year's time) to a disadvantaged youngster as part of a campaign to help youngsters travel to college to study
- 'Claim Your College,' the group campaigning for a teacher-led College of Teaching who published their second Newsletter suggesting that it may not cost as much to set the College up as originally envisaged
- The Local Government Association who have argued that government rather than local taxpayers should be responsible for the costs of the academies programme
- The Sutton Trust who announced a new scheme to help the most 'highly able' 11-14 year old state school pupils attend seminar days at leading universities
- The think tank Demos who with the University of Durham published a collection of essays suggesting that while the attainment gap between the most and least advantaged remains wide, some strategies are beginning to have an impact
- The National Literacy Trust who together with Pearson published the second annual survey into early years reading and found that touch-screen technology can help encourage those from disadvantaged backgrounds to read

- Selfies which have emerged as the fastest growing social media form this year

Tweet of the week

- *'Technology will never replace good teaching but teachers who use technology well will replace those who don't.'* @FEWeek
- *"Teenagers' brains do actually shut down when their parents are talking to them."* @thei100

Quote(s) of the week

- *"The changes I announce today are not a net giveaway but actually tighten the public finances a little."* The Chancellor in his Autumn Statement
- *"Things would be healthier if we could all stop thinking about Ofsted quite so often and focus on what pupils need, not what we think the inspector might require."* Russell Hobby, general secretary of the NAHT

Number(s) of the week

- 2.4%. The Chancellor's forecast for UK growth in 2015
- Over 1,100. The number of providers operating in the FE sector according to the National Audit Office
- 70%. The number of UK primary and secondary schools who now use tablet computers

What to look out for next week

- HEFCE Conference on widening participation and access (Monday)
- Nick Boles MP speech on 14-19 education at IPPR (Tuesday)
- TES webchat with Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt (5.00pm Tuesday)
- Another Education Committee witness session on Apprenticeships and Traineeships for 16-19 yr olds (Wednesday)